DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 828 UD 023 486

AUTHOR Ratteray, Joan Davis
TITLE Alternative Educational Options for Minorities and the Poor. An Interim Project Report.
INSTITUTION National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Sep 83
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Economically Disadvantaged; Elementary Secondary Education; *Institutional Characteristics; *Minority Groups; *Neighborhood Schools; *Nontraditional Education; Parent Participation; *Private Schools; Teacher Characteristics; Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

This report presents a summary of findings resulting from visits to 40 independent neighborhood schools in 1983. Most of the schools consider themselves independent preparatory institutions; most are indigenous to and located in low-income urban areas and serving the academic and social needs of Black, Hispanic, American Indian and Asian-American children. Information is provided on students (enrollment, average stay, testing, later education), staff characteristics, physical structure, parental involvement, curriculum, and funding. A summary of the interview questions and answers touches on why such schools started, their successes and setbacks, the future of alternative schools, growth and expansion, improvements needed, and feelings of parents and administrators regarding educational vouchers and tuition tax credits. (CMG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED242828

National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise
1130 Seventeenth Street, N.W., Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20036/(202) 331-1103

September 1983

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR MINORITIES AND THE POOR

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robt. L. Woodson, Pres.
Nat'l Ctr for Neighborhood Enterprise
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

An Interim Project Report
by Joan Davis Ratteray, Ph.D

A recent survey by the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise has identified more than 250 independent neighborhood schools nationwide. Informed estimates suggest that the actual total number is much greater. These are schools meeting the academic and social needs of Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian-American children, primarily in urban neighborhoods. In-depth site visits to verify reported findings have been conducted to 40 sites to date, with additional visits pending.

Background

Many parents of minority and poor children are disillusioned by the lack of quality in traditional public school systems--especially large inner-city schools. Parents see their children trapped in an educational system that promises low-achievement. It is clear that public school systems do not respond efficiently or effectively to many of the basic educational needs of many inner-city underachieving poor children. These children never learn basic reading, writing, and computation skills.

Consequently, a large number of student lose interest in education and drop out, or are "pushed out" after 12 years of inadequate formal schooling. The rise in youth unemployment is directly related to this ineffective schooling. Youngsters are not equipped for economic survival or jobs, and cannot compete in a rapidly changing technological society.

As the educational debate rages on about issues of forced busing, merit pay for teachers and bilingual education, the widespread failure by educational institutions continues to have a crippling effect on students.

UD023486

There is evidence, however, that neighborhood self-help responses to these failures hold promise. Across the United States, many parents of poor and minority children are controlling the education of their children, by choosing neighborhood-based private schools.

They are enrolling their children in private schools that operate almost exclusively on tuition and modest community fundraising--often at great financial sacrifice--using welfare checks, depending on family and friends for tuition, by working multiple jobs or using weekends to supplement educational objectives. Many have found a way to escape the educational crisis. Neighborhood parents have found or created schools that respond to their needs. They are finding committed educators to help their children succeed. While these parents generally do not seek to replace the role of the public school in the education of all minorities, they do seek to establish alternatives that can be nurtured into viable institutions that can make valuable and equal contributions. In the process they hope to be able to influence policymakers to redirect some of the public resources in a more equitable manner.

These independent schools are meeting the challenges of educating minority and poor children; NCNE would like to assist in harnessing this rich and vital national resource.

The Center has found that often these independent schools lack endowed academic and social programs. Instead, they are often located in inadequate physical facilities in some of the poorest inner-city neighborhoods. Yet, teaching and learning in these schools are unparalleled.

Most of the schools have curricula guided by a formal cultural or religious doctrine that provides educational discipline. Coursework includes high level math and foreign language instruction at early grade levels. Most schools have a formal program in computer literacy. Foreign languages include Spanish, French, Ki Swahili, Chinese, Latin and Arabic. The schools provide global awareness to their students who will have to compete in a world outside of their environments.

Reading and writing skills are emphasized and the academic performance of students is measured periodically by standardized tests.

The National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise intends to promote the growth and development of these schools by publicizing their accomplishments, providing forums for exchange of ideas and technical expertise, creating a data bank to serve as a resource for policy analysis and archive development.

Preliminary Report

Following is a summary of the findings resulting from NCNE's first site visits in July and September 1983:

- Most schools consider themselves "independent academic preparatory institutions," rather than "traditional" or "cultural" institutions;

- Most are indigenous to and located in low-income areas of cities and towns, however, weekend schools are usually outside of cities;

- At least 35 states are represented in the survey;

Students

- The average enrollment is about 200 students, ranging from a low of 22 to a high of over 800;

- The average length of a student's enrollment is three years, with a range of two to seven years;

- Most schools provide instruction from preschool through 8th grade. There are some high schools;

- About half of the schools have an "open door" policy, and most require either in-house or standardized testing or both for placement;

- Many of the schools have a waiting list and cannot accommodate additional students at this time, while others are still capable of immediate expansion;

- Many of the graduates continue on to private schools, some on scholarships. The majority, however, go on to specialized or selective public high schools;

- A few schools have formal post-graduation tracking of students' further academic or career accomplishments. Many are beginning to institute such proceedings. Some rely on informal parental, student feedback and feedback from other schools.

Staff

- In most cases, teachers have undergraduate degrees, many have graduate degrees, and some have graduate credits. A few, however, specifically reject the notion of traditional credentials, focusing instead on demonstrated ability to teach, ideological or cultural empathy, and a dedication to the development of the children;

- A majority of the teachers live within the community served by the school, and are of the same ethnic/cultural background (but not necessarily the same religious background) as the children they teach;

- Some schools have teachers who are alumni and have earned degrees at traditional universities and have come back to teach in the school;

- Very few have volunteers in teaching capacities;
- Many teachers are former public school teachers or administrators.

Year Started

- Most of the schools were started in the mid-1970s, some in the mid-1960s, Muslim schools trace their origins to 1930, and others came into existence in the early 1900s.

Physical Structure

- Many schools own their own buildings and have plans for expansion;
- The structures generally are located in converted single-family dwellings or townhouses, former public school buildings, and one occupies two floors of a center-city office building;
- Most schools have a modest library and a playing area for their students; on the other hand, schools tend to share gymnasiums with other nearby institutions;
- Frequently the physical plants are in need of repair and painting, some need new major systems such as for heating and cooling.

Parents

- Most schools have parental groups that participate in school programs and support the schools financially with in-kind services and significant fundraising activities;

Curricula

- Most of the schools are state accredited or licensed where applicable in their states;
- All of the schools appear to have a cultural philosophy or religious doctrine that provides a context and purpose for the acquisition of knowledge;
- All schools start foreign language instruction at an early grade level. Many teach Spanish or French, a few Arabic, Chinese or Latin; and the Pan-African schools Swahili;
- Sciences and higher math are introduced at very early ages:
  --one school introduces biology to fourth and fifth grade students;

--another school uses its 24 computer lab in a community summer outreach program;

- Science fairs, reading competition, and educational trips support the curricula;

Source of Funds

- Most of the schools are supported by tuition, some report 60 to 90 percent of their income from tuition, while a few only 40 percent and less; the range in fees were from $800 a year to over $2,000.

- The remaining income comes from foundations, churches, community organizations, or parental fundraising efforts. In-kind contributions are common, while government support though block grants from offices of education to non-public schools is utilized occasionally.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

How did you get started?

- Many parents and/or teachers were dissatisfied with the quality of education and the educational environment in urban public schools;

- Some separated from traditional institutions (pre-schools, elementary schools, or high schools), sometimes losing or rejecting funding by a religious organization on which they were dependent to become more self-reliant in in designing their school curricula;

- Many were started specifically because of perceived overt racism by public or private school administrators.

What have been some of your biggest successes?

- The most common response was the rewarding feeling of seeing a child start out several grades behind and then catch up with or surpass their peers in traditional schools by several grades;

- Some were simply grateful that they were able to stay open or experience rapid growth in a short period of time, or get parents and the community involved in the school.

- Some felt that the school programs relieved much of the loneliness and isolation experienced in traditional schooling;

What have been some of your setbacks?

- The most common response was not having enough funds to provide competitive salaries for teachers or to provide equipment and materials for programs;

If you had to do it over, what would you do differently?

- Most people responded "nothing," some would not begin unless they had more secure advance funding and a few would never do it again at any price.

What is the future of alternative schools?

Generally:

- The schools will continue to grow, and independent school are on the "upswing;"
- People are beginning to see that alternative schools have a legitimate right to exist and want to begin outreach programs.
- Only a few were not optimistic.

With community support?

- Minority businesses should be encouraged to give donations to help minority schools;
- Families often rely on welfare checks to pay tuition;
- Families demonstrate active involvement only after they see what their children are achieving;
- Sometimes communities resist becoming involved until the school proves itself;
- Many public institutions do not share their facilities even though many of these alternative programs serve the educational needs of these children.

Relating to public schools

- Some felt that private schools played a positive and cooperative role with public schools, while others saw themselves in an adverse posture.

How much more growth do you want?

- Most schools are prepared to expand slowly, adding either the next lowest or next highest grade year by year;
- Some are aggressively positive in their approach to unlimited expansion;

- Some prefer to remain as they are for the present time.

What do you need to strengthen your organization?

- Some cited specific programs in writing skills, analytical thinking, verbal communication, sciences, computers, or advanced mathematics;
- Most wanted their existing staff to receive further training, not new staff, while others wanted administrative assistance;
- Rehabilitation of the physical plant, the purchase of instructional equipment and library books were often cited;
- Measurement instruments for achievement would be appreciated by most, while some were interested in developing the data base needed to evaluate measurement instruments in the curricula;

What do you feel about vouchers and tuition tax credits?

- Vouchers were widely acclaimed as having significant promise for helping independent schools, as well as for making public schools more accountable;
- Tuition tax credits were seen often to be irrelevant to the constituencies of these schools, who have small tax liabilities; However, many felt the idea has brought more visibility to the concept of supporting parental choice;
- Almost all of the schools would reject government financial support if it meant that the schools would have to compromise their academic or cultural/religious agenda;
- Few parents and administrators seem to understand the technical issues surrounding either vouchers or tuition tax credits, because they said most were too busy struggling for survival to initiate an investigation of these subjects. However, most wanted more information and discussion on the issues;

Independent Neighborhood Schools
Selected Data (as of September 1983)
NCNE Project Director: Joan D. Ratteray

Year Started:	Most from 1965 to 1975 Some from 1900 to 1930
Enrollment:	Average 200; Range 22 to 1,000
Grades:	Generally K-8; Some preschool and 12th grade
Length of Stay:	From 3 to 7 years
Tuition:	$855 to $2,500. Some free.
Schools in survey:	over 250
States represented:	35
Site visits to date:	40

Schools tentatively reported in selected areas:

California	24
D.C.	14
Florida	23
Illinois	33
New York	43
Pennsylvania	30